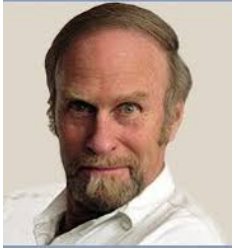


# It's all Downhill From Here, 'Cept What's Up



By Frosty Wooldridge

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*"Youth is wasted on the young."* –Emerson

Climbing. It's hard work having fun. My legs pay a price in the mountains. I never complain because mountains provide beauty not found on the flats. Many times, pedaling becomes incidental because my eyes gaze at a distant canyon. At other moments, I may crest a pass that offers a 50-mile view across cloud shrouded summits. With every climb, a descent is - inevitable. I go from hard work to fun. After cranking for hours on a steep grade, at the top, pedaling becomes easier. I shift into a higher gear, and seconds later, my gravity-motor takes over. No more pedaling. I get to glide down the other side. It's sheer delight after a long climb.

Yet, with mountain touring, it's in the back of my mind that - whatever I lose in elevation on a descent, the road will make me pay with another climb.

That's the way the snaking road treated me on Route 89 heading into Jerome, Arizona. What made it even more maddening was the incessant up and down—all that morning. By the time I reached the cobbled streets of the town, I was tired. It was hot and sticky from not taking a shower the night before. I stopped at a small park.

Jerome is perched on the side of a mountain, overlooking the

Red Rocks of Sedona 10 miles across the valley. After leaning my bike against a table, I spotted a bench facing the valley. It was quite a view. Sitting there, relaxing my legs, I looked up and down the street. It was a ghost town. The well-maintained storefronts were built in the 1800's. Hotel Connor (1898) stood on the corner of the main street. Jerome had prospered during a copper strike, but was abandoned when the ore ran out. If not for the cars, I could imagine horses and wagons, along with cowboys riding up and down the streets. I sat there wondering how the horses pulled heavy wagons up 2,000-foot grades from the valley.

I was savoring my third banana and was about to peel an orange when I noticed two riders coming up the street below me. They rode mountain bikes. One appeared younger and the second was much older. They kept cranking until they spotted my bike. The older lady turned toward me. She dripped sweat from her face - and arms. Her jersey was soaked.

"How are you doing this morning?" I said, greeting her. "Looks like you've been working overtime."

"Ah," she smirked. "It's all downhill from here, 'cept what's up."

"I guess you could look at it that way," I said, noting her - rather odd statement. "Where you coming from?"

"We just busted our tails riding up from the valley," she answered. "I'm training for a tour around Europe for three months this summer. I want to be in shape for the Alps. I'm doing another 3,000 feet yet today."

"You're a glutton for punishment," I said. "These up and downs are killing me."

"I've been living in these mountains my entire life," she said. "It's a matter of attitude, and you won't find anyone with a better attitude than mine."

"I like you," I said. "My name's Frosty."

"Katie Lee," she said, gripping my hand. "I like your bike. It's a beauty. You sure have it loaded. I like that orange flag out to the side and the one on top."

"I like drivers to see me long before they pass," I said.

"Smart boy," she said. "I think I'll do the same for my trip."

"I recommend it."

We talked, and talked some more. At 65, going on 25, this lady was a walking dynamo. Her energy exceeded most people one third her age. She had been a dancer, cowgirl, bartender, guitarist, mother, waitress, bookkeeper, saleswoman, farmer, mountain guide, horsewoman, and was currently a singer in a - country band.

As we talked into the morning about touring. The conversation turned to people. She thought many folks had given up their lives to television and cars.

"Damn boob tube anyway," she said. "It's damn well ruined the youth of this country. They think their problems should be solved in one hour. They think they can have something for - nothing. When they can't have it, they fall apart. You ever notice how lazy everyone one is today? I mean, they drive the shiniest cars while their bodies go to hell in a basket. Not me by God. I'm going to make a hundred, and give 'em hell all the way."

Katie talked my ears off. Her spunk rubbed off on me. I loved her spirit. She didn't know everything, but she knew how to live. Her life force touched me. She picked me up that day. She raised my consciousness. She had been through tough times, but never sat around feeling sorry for herself. I promised - myself that when I grew older, I would remember her, and I would be like her.

In the afternoon, I coasted down a long curving highway to the floor of the valley.

Free ride. It was fun, but at Camp Verde on Route 279, the road climbed. Soon, trees replaced cactus and the road meandered toward the sky. It carried me

toward Strawberry Hill. I burned my legs cranking up a steady incline. Twenty miles later and I was still busting my butt - wondering if that Queen Medusa of a mountain had a backside.

(Sandi  
and  
Frosty  
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tour  
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)



My legs exploded with blood. I guzzled quarts of water. A monsoon of sweat from my body splashed onto the pavement. I munched slices of bread, inhaled apples and swallowed chunks of banana like a street sweeping vacuum cleaner at Disneyland. Into the late afternoon, the mountain still climbed ahead of me. I looked around each bend with high expectation that it would be the crest. Forget it. This road was taking me to heaven while putting me through hell.

In the early evening, golden sky banners waved across the horizon, lit by a fiery sun. Just when I was about to call it

quits, and accept my fate of no bath again that night, I hit the top. Shifting into higher gears, I rolled along easier, then faster. I leveled off in high gear, going down, slowly at first, then faster. My whole attitude changed. From a grinding struggle to ultimate success. A mile later, a campground with a shower came into view. Then Katie popped into my consciousness. She had said, "All you have to do is keep pedaling." She was right. (Oh, she was called the "Lady of the Grand Canyon"...and lived to the age of 99.)

It's all downhill from here, 'cept what's up.

Excerpts from my book: The Kickstand Chronicles—The Miraculous, Funny, Sublime, and Downright Terrifying Subtitle: Inevitable Moments of the Ride, Bicycling Across Six Continents, 45 years, 150,000 Miles by Frosty Wooldridge

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